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Male strippers take Mumbai's hip women to new highs, and sighs, on the social circuit

Naughty, seductive and even funny-male strippers are the latest. And they are taking the city's hip women to new highs, and sighs, on the social circuit.

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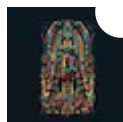


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'No fuel': When Lalu Yadav flatly refused to lend his jeep to Karpoori Thakur

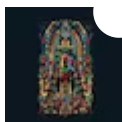


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Midnight in a Mumbai suburb. A howling house of local lasses – there are no men – gyrate to loud, pulsating music. Upfront, in the centre, lies a huge gift-wrapped box around which everybody settles. Some of the women get impatient and start shouting obscenities. Others kick condom balloons that litter the floor. Suddenly, as the lights dim and then come on strong, a powerfully built man in police uniform, complete with handcuffs and a colourful baton, bursts out of the box.

As everyone screams in unison, the man quickly cuffs a girl standing close by. What follows is a slow, sensuous, bump and grind routine where the man slowly takes off his clothes one by one as the handcuffed girl shrieks in horror and delight.



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By the time he's down to his psychedelic g-string, the women around are in a frenzy, screaming, whistling, pumping their fists and even daring each other into shoving currency notes down his underwear.

A wild, female fantasy? Not really. It's actually just an out of the ordinary bridal shower that's been given a sexy twist by the latest thing to give a lift to Mumbai's women after the wonderbra-male strippers. Yes, the tribe exists, albeit in a shadowy, clandestine, word-of-mouth kind of existence.

In an era when everyone is trying to reposition the conventional (read boring) as unorthodox and enticing, the male stripper seems to be the new ticket that gets these metropolitan women on a new pedestal on the social circuit.

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That lets them break out of the "been-there-done-that" mould and lets them boast about something new. But that isn't the only reason. For most of them, the male stripper is naughty, seductive, even funny, and yet helps them make a feminist statement.

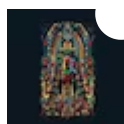
Says Bindu, 24, the would-be bride whose friends got together and organised the party: "Why should only men have wild bachelor parties. I was thrilled at having male strippers for the party and all of us had a blast . . . they were great." And expensive.

In Mumbai right now, there are at least four to five groups that offer male strippers but not without a reference – by someone for whom they have already performed. They'll shed their clothes either at a house or a pub that has been booked for the night.

One of the groups, The Greek Gods, sometimes charges as much as Rs 25,000 per night.



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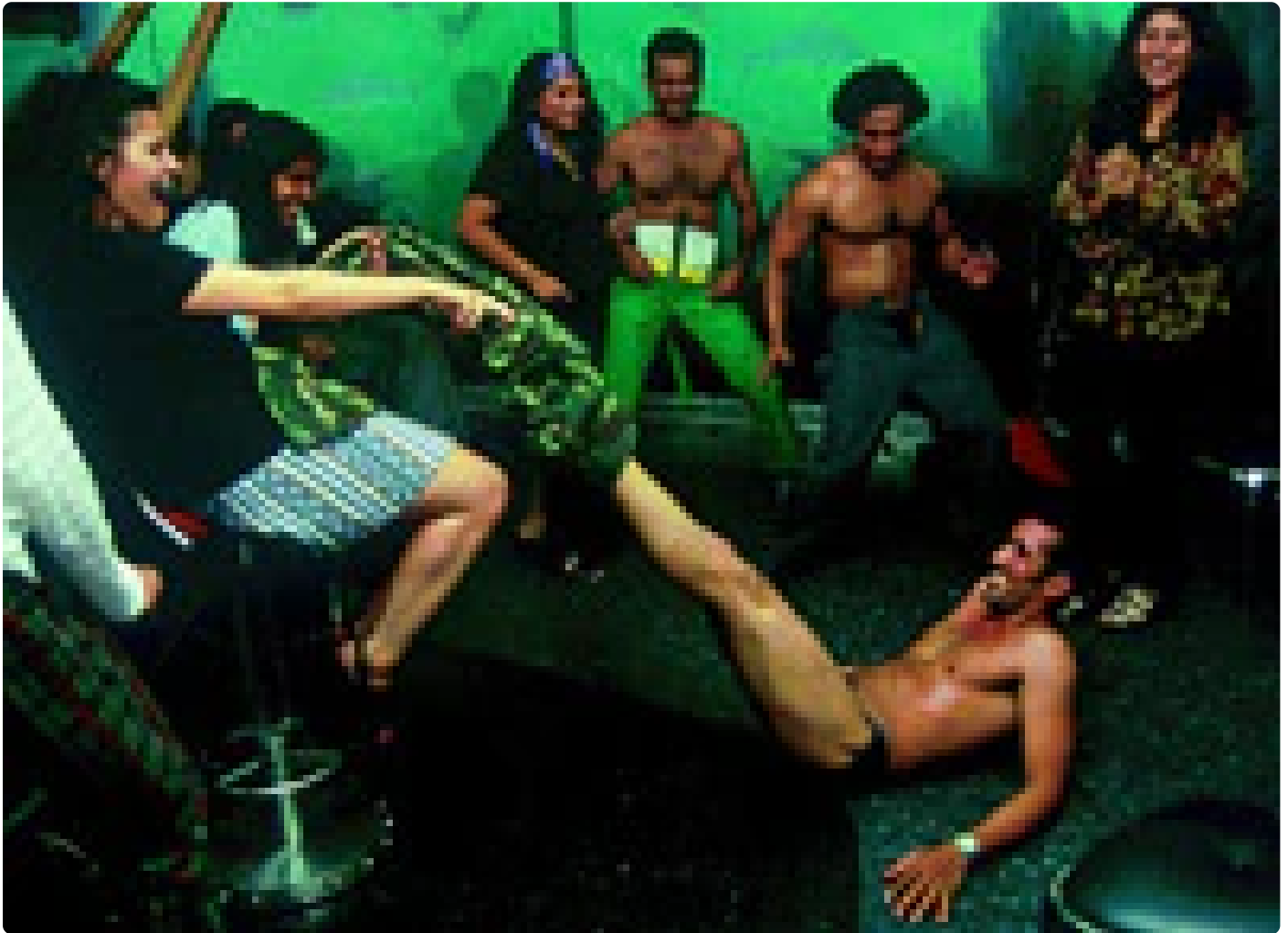


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Besides the uniformed policeman, there is the macho gunslinging cowboy with a black Stetson hat, boots, spurs and a lasso. Or there is the gentleman-about-town with the proverbial stiff upper lip, bowler hat, coat-tails, a polished cane and an elaborate bow tie. Recently, Dina Sheth, a 60-year-old grandmother, organised a pre-wedding surprise party for her 18-year-old granddaughter Nina that revolved around a jungle. The guests walked in to find three hunks - call them The Indian Tarzan Boys - in loincloth and fake animal skins moving to a samba tune, just raring to remove strip.

Says Sheth: "My message to my grand-daughter was to lose all her inhibitions for those few hours before preparing ahead for real life." And did it work? "I didn't think I could enjoy this. But I tackled my shyness. I feel I'm more broadminded now," adds Nina.

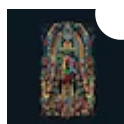


But most women don't look at these sessions as opportunities to learn life's lessons. "Heck no. It's all about good fun," says Janaki Ambani, a 25-year-old advertising executive. A night out with the girls, doing your own thing. You get drunk, you shout, you scream and eventually you throw money.

Adds Farita Boyce, a professional dancer herself, who loves such parties: "I feel really powerful when I throw money at them like the men do." And though most crowds behave themselves, sometimes it gets really wild. "Nail scratches and bottom pinching are professional hazards in this game," says Jayesh Barot, a 21-year-old computer engineer and part-time stripper.



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The Greek Gods recounts how a woman suddenly jumped up and squeezed his crotch "so hard that I was hospitalised".

Nobody said stripping was cheese cake. There's an art to it. Ask the boys. "Female stripping just requires coquetry. Males have to do a lot more grinding," says 21-year-old K. Shetty, already well

"Female stripping just re

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The rules of the game are strictly professional. No fooling around with the women. This is strictly enforced, especially since the business they get is through word-of-mouth and once they have a tainted reputation, nobody wants them.

Besides, nobody does the full monty - they just strip to their g-strings. Not when Mumbai's politicians are fast losing their liberal attitudes. "Sometimes, the job can be tough as hell," adds Barot.

But there is a bright side to the job too. First, it's a great ego kick. Most of the current strippers come from middle-class backgrounds, boys barely in their 20s, many of them already into the entertainment business as professional dancers.

Many of their parents know they are professional dancers, very few know that they are into stripping. And it pays to add a striptease to their dancing - the average male stripper makes between Rs 20,000 and Rs 25,000 a month.

And that figure seems to be growing. For Ali, one of the strippers, it's like a long time fantasy come true. His friends treat him with a new-found respect and sit wide-eyed for hours as he brags about how the women kept begging him to take his clothes off.

Before his stripping career, he was just another well-built boy in Mumbai's suburbia. Ali smiles and says: "You know, of one thing I'm sure. Even if I were super rich, I'd still be stripping." And why not, when the phone keeps ringing today with women who had met him at these private parties.

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